

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 0829

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT BM

SUBU: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE DEPARTURE OF GENERAL TIN OO

REF: RANGOON 0762

1. THE SURPRISE RESIGNATION OF DEFENSE MINISTER TIN OO FROM HIS CABINET, ARMY AND PARTY POSITIONS HAS PROMPTED A WAVE OF SPECULATION AROUND RANGOON ABOUT THE REAL REASONS FOR HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE GUB LEADERSHIP. THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HOLDS THAT THIS WAS RELATED TO THE ONGOING FRICTION BETWEEN TIN OO AND BSPP SECRETARY-GENERAL SAN YU. WHILE WISDOM THAT IS CONVENTIONAL NEED NOT BE WRONG, WE BELIEVE A CASE CAN BE MADE THAT OTHER FACTORS, IN PART AT LEAST, CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECISION TO DROP TIN OO FROM THE RANKS.

2. THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S DISMISSAL WAS OF COURSE THE EXTRA-LEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITIES OF HIS WIFE, DAW TIN MOE WAI. AS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, NE WIN LAST MONTH CALLED IN THE TOP GUB LEADERS AND THEIR WIVES TO WARN THEM ABOUT HIGH LEVEL CORRUPTION, NOTING THAT HE HAD CLEANED HIS OWN HOUSE WITH THE DETENTION OF HIS EX-SISTER-IN-LAW ON CHARGES OF SELLING TEXTILES ON THE BLACK MARKET. DAW TIN MOE WIN EVIDENTLY HAD THE BAD JUDGEMENT TO CONTINUE HER ACTIVITIES (SHE ALLEGEDLY BROUGHT IN BURMESE CURRENCY BOUGHT DURING HER RECENT TRIP TO LONDON). NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE BUREAU
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CHIEF COLONEL TIN OO REPORTEDLY DEVELOPED THE EVIDENCE OF THIS AND

BROUGHT IT TO NE WIN'S ATTENTION; IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT COL. TIN OO TENDS TO SIDE WITH GENERAL SAN YU RATHER THAN WITH HIS NAMESAKE. AFTER TAKING SUCH A FIRM POSTURE BEFORE THE GUB LEADERSHIP ON THE CORRUPTION QUESTION, NE WIN COULD NOT IGNORE THE CHARGES LEVIED AGAINST THE FAMILY OF THE DEFENSE MINISTER, DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE HAS A VERY CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GENERAL TIN OO. (NE WIN REPORTEDLY TOLD THE BSPP CENTRAL COMMITTEE AFTER THE RESIGNATION HAD BEEN APPROVED THAT IT IS AGONIZING TO CHOOSE BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAW.) HE SUBSEQUENTLY REITERATED THIS THEME PUBLICLY AT THE CURRENT PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY, EXPLAINING THE ACTION TAKEN AGAINST GENERAL TIN OO BUT ADDING HE DID NOT WISH TO TARNISH TIN OO'S OWN INTEGRITY IN THE PROCESS).

3. IN A SENSE, TIN OO WAS A VICTIM OF THE "NEW MORALITY" THAT WE HAVE BEEN SEEING IN BURMA FOR THE PAST FEW MONTHS, I.E., THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST DECADENT WESTERN CULTURE, THE CRACKDOWN ON CORRUPT TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS AND SMUGGLERS, ETC. ONE CAN BUILD A PLAUSIBLE SCENARIO RELATING THIS TO NE WIN'S VISIT TO BJ NA LAST DECEMBER. THE PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY WAS IMPRESSED BY THE STRIDES IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS THAT HAD OCCURRED SINCE HIS LAST VISIT IN 1971. HE COULD WELL HAVE COME AWAY FRUSTRATED AND ANGRY BY THE FAILURE OF BURMESE SOCIALISM TO MAKE SIMILAR PROGRESS; AS HE HAD OFTEN DONE IN THE PAST, HE WOULD TEND TO PIN THE BLAME ON INCOMPETENT AND CORRUPT OFFICIALS RATHER THAN ON THE MANNER IN WHICH SOCIALISM IN BURMA IS APPLIED. HE WOULD THUS ATTEMPT TO TREAT THE SYMPTOMS RATHER THAN THE CAUSE BY WEEDING OUT THOSE WHOSE DESIRE FOR WORLDLY GOODS BETRAYED THEIR COMMITMENT TO SOCIALIST GOALS. TIN OO, THROUGH HIS WIFE'S MISJUDGEMENT, BECOMES THE HIGHEST LEVEL VICTIM OF THE "NEW MORALITY" SINCE THE OUSTER OF TRADE MINISTER SAN WIN IN DECEMBER, ALTHOUGH HE MAY WELL NOT BE THE LAST.

4. ALONG THE SAME LINES, IT IS CONCEIVABLE TOO THAT IN MAKING THE HARD DECISION ON TIN OO, THE PRESIDENT MAY HAVE TAKEN SOME OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT HIM INTO CONSIDERATION AS WELL. TIN OO IS GENERALLY REGARDED AS A PRAGMATIC PERSONA, TOUGH, OPERATION-ORIENTED SOLDIER RATHER THAN A THEORETICIAN. DURING HIS STEWARDSHIP, FOR INSTANCE, THE BSPP HAS BEEN UNABLE TO EXERT ITS TOTAL DOMINANCE OF THE BURMA ARMY. IN THE PROCESS OF RATING HIM ON REVOLUTIONARY ZEAL (WHICH NE WIN MAY WELL BELIEVE IS WHAT IS REQUIRED TO MAKE SOCIALISM SUCCESSFUL HERE), TIN OO WOULD NOT SCORE WELL. THIS CONSIDERATION

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SHOULD NOT BE OVERDRAWN, HOWEVER, AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BUT ONE OF MANY PERSONAL AND POLITICAL FACTS NE WIN WOULD HAVE WEIGHED. CERTAINLY, WITHOUT THE CORRUPTION CHARGE, NE WIN WOULD NOT HAVE DROPPED TIN OO FOR THIS REASON ALONE.

5. AS TO THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ABOUT THE SAN YU-TIN OO SPLIT, TIN OO'S REMOVAL OF COURSE IS A VICTORY FOR SAN YU, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT TERM. ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT SAN YU ENGINEERED

TIN OO'S DOWNFALL (BEYOND PERHAPS COLONEL TIN OO'S HELPFUL REPORTING ON GENERAL TIN OO'S WIFE.), THE VICTORY COULD BE A PYRRHIC ONE. NE WIN MAY FEEL COMPELLED TO REDRESS THE TRADITIONAL SAN YU-TIN OO BALANCE IN SOME FASHION, PERHAPS BY DROPPING SAN YU AS WELL. AND, AFTER REMOVING A HIGHLY REGARDED ARMY OFFICER BECAUSE OF HIS WIFE'S INDISCRETIONS, HE CAN HARDLY IGNORE OTHER SIMILAR CASES OF CORRUPTION THAT COME TO HIS ATTENTION; SAN YU'S OWN WIFE IS ONE OF THOSE WHOSE WELL KNOWN ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES WOULD SEEM TO MAKE HER (AND HIM) A PRIME CANDIDATE.

6. HOW FAR NE WIN WILL BE WILLING OR ABLE TO CARRY ON HIS "NEW MORALITY" CAMPAIGN IS AN OPEN QUESTION. CERTAINLY IF HE PURSUED IT RELENTLESSLY, HE WOULD PROBABLY END UP DROPPING MUCH OF THE CABINET AS WELL AS A GREAT DEAL OF THE ARMY LEADERSHIP AND THE TOP BUREAUCRACY SINCE DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS HAVE MADE SOME DEGREZ OF PUBLIC LARCENY A NECESSITY FOR SURVIVAL. THUS, THIS EFFORT, LIKE MANY OF NE WIN'S OTHER GRAND PLANS, MAY BE THWARTED BY THE REALITIES OF BURMA.

7. AS TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF TIN OO'S REMOVAL FOR US INTERESTS, WE SEE FEW IF ANY. OUR PRINCIPLE CONCERN - NARCOTICS - SHOULD REMAIN UNAFFECTED SINCE TIN OO HAD RELATIVELY LITTLE TO DO DIRECTLY WITH THE ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS AND THE BURMESE STRUCTURE TO DEAL WITH THAT PROBLEM HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY INSTITUTIONALIZED, NOT DEPENDENT ON A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL. THERE IS NO DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT NE WIN HAS LOST THE SERVICES OF A DEDICATED AND LOYAL MILITARY OFFICER.

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